

Saving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action: full of hope or just hopeless?

On July 14, 2015, Iran, the P5+1 countries (China, France, Russia, UK, USA, and Germany), and the European Union signed a landmark nuclear agreement that officially went into effect on Jan 16, 2016.¹ Under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA; also known as the Iran nuclear deal), Iran was to put severe limitations on its nuclear programme in exchange for the removal of international sanctions. After signing this agreement, Iranian scientists considered it an historic opportunity for the scientific community, and they became hopeful that lifting the sanctions could gradually help their scientific advancements in many ways.² Researchers both inside and outside of the country were cautiously optimistic about the opportunities that would arise after the sanctions were lifted.³ In some ways, the agreement was meant to usher in a new era of scientific advancement in Iran.

Although the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has frequently reiterated Iran's adherence to the nuclear agreement, surprisingly, on Oct 13, 2017, President Donald Trump announced that the USA would not certify Iranian compliance with the JCPOA, and warned that he might ultimately terminate the agreement.⁴ This decision opened the door for US Congress to consider reimposing the sanctions, which had been lifted under the Iran nuclear deal. However, the IAEA has always had access to all locations that its inspectors have requested to visit, and, according to the UN watchdog's report, Iran remains in compliance with the JCPOA.⁵

The Iranian scientific community is now pessimistic, and some theoreticians consider this agreement only as a strategy of hope. Before these latest political conflicts, the JCPOA was considered to be a model for

global interactions based on mutual constructive engagement, and its implementation was crucial for regional and global stability. However, recent political conflicts have substantially damaged the positive atmosphere in the scientific community. It is now believed that the USA is trying to make all efforts to prevent Iran from taking advantage of this agreement, creating an ambiguous atmosphere that makes people worldwide doubtful about any confident cooperation with the Iranian community. This destructive atmosphere can potentially diminish Iran's benefits from the agreement.

No one can forget the long-lasting process that yielded the agreement, which will not be easy to achieve again. Since there has not been any evidence against Iran's activities, the remaining partners should adhere to the JCPOA, ask the USA not to harm it, and stay unified in their commitment. It is a very important time to strengthen those parts of the agreement responsible for expert exchanges, to foster the cooperation needed for full success of the deal.

Apart from the direct effects of sanctions on political relations, the economy, oil prices, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, and foreign exposure and transactions, there are also hidden aspects that indirectly affect the Iranian scientific community.⁶ In recent years, the uneasy association between science and politics resulted in uncertainty about the sustainability of science in Iran. For the scientific community, this latest political conflict is another lesson indicating that science and politics are entwined. The current atmosphere, whether intentional or not, is hurting the basis of science in Iran. The Iranian scientific community is now worried about the future of JCPOA because of its impact on scientists, academics, researchers, and students worldwide.

I declare no competing interests.

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Treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons and Germany's global health responsibility

The adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons by the UN¹ and the immediate support by 50 nations is, as Andy Haines and Helfand² note, “a victory for the public health perspective over the misguided national power and security considerations that have dominated nuclear policy” for decades. Strong support for the treaty by countries with a commitment to global health is needed to safeguard humanity.

Because Germany is becoming an important actor in global health,³ strong and unconditional support for the treaty would be an influential political signal towards nuclear armed states and a motivation for other countries to provide support for this multilateral instrument. However, the German Government has refused to support the treaty, reiterating this position even after the Nobel Peace Prize 2017 was awarded to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. This absence of



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